

## Lesson 6 – Fear and Fear of the Lord

Before I get started, I want to make sure that even though I've been asked to provide some insights towards the topic of fear and the fear of God and the related Psalms, that I by no means am some expert in this component of my Christian walk. I can assure you that I join each of you in the challenges of moving my fears **without** God to a fear **of** God. This is a topic that I am quite familiar with, and I hope that you will be blessed by the discoveries that come from a better understanding of what it means to fear God. First, though, let's talk about fear.

In the NIV Bible, the word "fear" is used 326 times. Approximately half of the time, it is related to the fear of God. As a noun (a thing), fear is defined as an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger. As a verb (an action), fear is defined as to be afraid of: expect with alarm; fear the worst. Whether a noun or a verb, fear produces much fruit – most of it is bad and comes in many forms.

There are over 500 named fears. Some of the more notable ones are fear of heights known as acrophobia; tight spaces – claustrophobia; spiders/bugs – arachnophobia; church – ecclesiophobia; there's even a fear of the bogeyman known as bogophobia. Then there's the all encompassing panophobia which is the fear of everything.

Okay – ever asked the question, "How did fear come into existence?" or "Where did it come from?" Well, as usual, the Bible tells us. I believe we have to go back to the very beginning to see where fear came from. I'm going to make the case that the first-fruits of sin is fear. Let's take a trip back to the garden of Eden and see what we learn.

In Genesis 2:15-17 we read, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God *commanded* the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for *when* you eat of it you will surely die."

What did God do? He was clear in his instruction. He told the truth. He warned of the consequences of disobedience. Isn't this what we want in God?

Now the trouble maker – listen to what Satan does in Genesis 3:1b 3:4-5: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

What did Satan do? He challenged the Word of God. He lied about the truthfulness of the Word of God. He deceived them of the consequences of disobedience. Satan's motivation from the beginning is to separate us from the promises and assurances of God.

We know what happens, but pay attention to exactly what happened in Genesis 3:6b-10a: "she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and *they hid* from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid."

What was Adam and Eve's *immediate* reaction to their sin? They covered themselves and hid – they were afraid. Without the fear of God, we get fear without God. This kind of fear is destructive and leads to countless behaviors that typically lead us away from God – totally counter to what God's original plan was.

One question comes to mind about fear – should we have fear other than of God. I would suggest we should be fearful of ourselves. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in chapter 7 of Romans: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am!" Can anyone here relate to this? Okay – let's talk about a better fear.

The fear of God is defined throughout the Bible. Proverbs defines it as the beginning of knowledge. Psalms, Proverbs, and Job describe it as the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. Proverbs calls it a fountain of life – turning a man from the snares of death. Isaiah 33:6 tells us: "He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the **fear** of the LORD is the key to this treasure."

The fear of God is a relationship. Like any relationship, the more time you spend with God, the better you get to know Him. Out of this knowledge you develop an understanding of God's character. *If you want to pursue the relationship*, you become aware of those things that will bless God as well as those that might upset Him. You will seek to focus on what is good in God's eyes.

The fear of God is a better way to live. Because God is good and He created you, He knows what is best for you. His promise is that by pursuing a relationship with Him, our lives will be like a fountain. Does your life feel like a fountain?

The fear of God is something to treasure. He promises to be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge. But like any treasure, it is there, but it needs to be found. That requires a choice to pursue the treasure – it's better than any amount of money, precious metals, or jewels. It may cause some pain along the way, but remember what the Apostle Paul claims in Romans 8:18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Okay – let's take a look at the 5 Psalms for today. Psalm 23 is possibly the most famous chapter in the Bible. It is written by King David. It is Important to understand at what point in David's life did he write this. There is much wisdom and offers a reflective perspective – recalling his days as a shepherd – this is probably written later in life as it describes David's experiences in trusting the LORD.

Psalm 23 is a statement of assurance that God is with us NOW – "The Lord *IS* my shepherd". It is also a statement of assurance that God WILL BE with us – "I *SHALL* not be in want". In writing about God as a shepherd, David states that God "Makes me lie down in green pastures" – it is a statement of assurance of God as providing us SUFFICIENCY and SATISFACTION. Jesus had to remind Paul about His sufficiency in 2 Corinthians 12:9: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Notice the leadership of our LORD. "He *leads* me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. <sup>[SEP]</sup>He *guides* me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Sheep are frightened by turbulent waters, and we get frightened by turbulent times. It often leaves us in unrest. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, reminds us who are frightened that He is where we should go in turbulent times in Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest".

In Jesus' day, the shepherds never drove the sheep, they *led* them which means the sheep knew the shepherd's voice. By reading the Bible and learning God's word, we are learning to hear His voice. The more we hear it by learning it, the more we will be able to trust Him and find the rest He promises in this Psalm. Listen to what Jesus says in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel of John, "but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."

Reading on in Psalm 23, we read, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." This is a statement of courage based on the assurances of the Good Shepherd's rod (for defense) and staff (for direction).

The Psalm ends with "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD <sup>[SEP]</sup> forever." Who are these statements of assurance for? I personally believe that funerals and memorial services are invitations by God to come to Him – especially for those who don't yet know Him. The assurances of this Psalm are wonderful, but they are only for those who believe in Him. Death is

the ultimate trump card to the human ego, and it is when man's guard is down. That is why this tremendous Psalm is seen **at the end** of so many people's lives. It is the invitation to both believer and non-believer to come to God and seek these assurances. It is our job as believers to get this message to those who don't know God to learn of these assurances **during** their life before their loved ones have to learn about it at the **end** of their lives.

Psalm 34 is written by King David - when he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left. The backdrop of this Psalm is David is being pursued by King Saul. He is hiding in various caves in a wilderness area near the Dead Sea. In being pursued by King Saul, David had to be growing weary, so he went to the land of the Philistines – the enemy of Israel. Some of the Philistines recognized him, and **out of his fear**, he began to act like a crazy person. Abimelech is disgusted with the insane man and sends him away. I wouldn't be surprised if after being released and returning to Israel in the wilderness, David probably came to the realization that he should have trusted God more.

Verse 1-3 say, "I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together." Known as the Hallelujah chorus – it's important to note that amidst all the fear David was experiencing, he found it in his heart to praise the Lord.

Verse 7 says, "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them." The angel of the Lord is only mentioned three times in the Psalms – many Bible commentators see the angel of the Lord in this verse as an appearance of the preincarnate Christ – often known as a Theophany or Christophany. The idea of the LORD encamping or abiding around those who fear Him and delivering them is a wonderful promise to those of us who have faith in Christ, and this is repeated often in the New Testament.

Two examples of this promise are in: Hebrews 13:5b: "because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you;" and Matthew 28:20b: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Psalm 34 offers several promises God makes to those who fear Him. They include: Verse 8b: "blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him." Verse 9b: "for those who fear Him lack nothing". Verse 10b: "those who seek the LORD lack no good thing". Verse 11: "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry;". Verse 18: "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Verse 22: "The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him." Do you believe these promises? If we believe enough in Jesus to make Him our savior, then shouldn't we believe everything else about His promises?

Psalm 46 is believed to be Martin Luther's favorite Psalm. It is one of deliverance. That deliverance comes from the LORD, and our trust in His ability to deliver us from our fears is broken into three key components to the character of God: The Sufficiency of God; The Security of God; and, the Supremacy of God.

In times of trouble, we can trust God. Too many of us fail to trust God because we don't understand His sufficiency to care for us. Verses 1-3 speak to the sufficiency of God: God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. How many of us have been in situations where it felt like the earth was giving away – we were totally helpless. The good news is God is sufficient.

Regarding the security of God, verse 5-7 offer great assurances: 5) God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. 6) Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. 7) The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Parallel verses to verse 5 refer to this being a prophecy of God's protection in the millennial kingdom. Some commentators claim that verse 6 is looking to the convulsions of the Great Tribulation.

In verses 8-11, we see the supremacy of God over His creation. "Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. 'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

One of the main fruits of fear is panic. When we're afraid, God is telling us to be still – something that goes against our nature. We can only do this because, as the Psalmist emphasizes twice, the LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Psalm 55 is written by King David, and it is a maschil Psalm which means it is a Psalm of instruction. The background is probably the time when David is being pursued by his son Absalom, and David's close friend, Ahithophel had betrayed him and gone over to Absalom's side. The clue is in verses 13-14 when he mentions "his close friend with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship".

David is once again fearing for his life. Verses 4-5 provided evidence of this: "My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me." Now remember, this is the same David who as a young boy confronted Goliath and slew with a single stone. What is his reaction to his fear? "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest – I would flee far away and stay in the desert; I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm."

He wants to run away and hide. Any of you ever wanted to run and hide from a frightening situation? I have and continue to. David, though, ultimately goes to the place he should have gone in the first place in verses 16-17: "But I call to God, and the LORD saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice." He then provides the great instruction in verse 22: "Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; <sup>1</sup>SEP he will never let the righteous fall." Remember, we are righteous because of our faith in Christ – and we indeed can cast our cares (or fears) on the LORD.

Psalms 76 is written by Asaph. The key verse in this Psalm is, "[God] You alone are to be feared. Who can stand before you when you are angry?" Remember the question the Apostle John asked in Chapter 6 of Revelation? "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who can stand?" Verse 10 is a follow-up to verse 7, "Surely your wrath against men brings you praise, and the survivors of your wrath are restrained."

Via the power of the Holy Spirit, God only lets man go so far. During the Great Tribulation, God will release the restraints on man for awhile. Ultimately, though, when Jesus returns, He will make the wrath of man to fear Him and praise Him.

To conclude this lecture I would like to tell you a story – a tale of two cities. One is known as the City of Fear, and the other is called the City of Victory. Everyone who lives there is born there. It is heavily populated. The climate is gloomy with it constantly being overcast. The seas are always turbulent, and the winds are howling and always changing direction.

People are doing one of two things – either running around frantically or they are doing nothing as if they're paralyzed. There are many two-way roads, but all but one result in a dead end. Some of the names of those roads include Anger Avenue, Regret Road, Depression Drive, Sorrow Street, and Phobia Place.

Now over in the City of Victory, it is very different – one might say it is completely different. Sadly, not too many people live there. The weather is sunny with white puffy clouds. The seas are calm, and there is a comfortable breeze that provides a wistful peace.

The people are calm, joyful, and living with a singular purpose. They are always watching out for each other. All the roads are lined with the most beautiful scenes of nature and lead to a glorious palace that radiates warmth and welcome.

Between the two cities is a wide, long, and deep canyon. The slopes are very steep and laced with sharp stones. Down the middle of the canyon is an icy cold and deep rushing river. It is impossible to get across on your own.

One day, a reporter became curious about the people in the City of Victory and decided to interview some of them. Since everyone is born in the City of Fear, the first natural question was, "How did people get to the City of Victory if there is no way to get across the canyon?"

After interviewing several of the residents, they all gave the same answer, "I found a bridge." With each answer, the reporter looked across the canyon and couldn't find a bridge. Frustrated, he said to one of the happy residents, "I don't see any bridges."

The City of Victory resident asked the reporter, "Where did you look?" Gazing out across the canyon and still seeing nothing said, "Out there – where else would I find one?"

The resident smiled and said, "the Bible".

"What?" the reporter asked with a confused look on his face. "I don't get it."

The resident gladly opened the Bible and read him Matthew 14:25-31 – which is the story of Jesus walking on the water, and He invites to Peter to walk to him on the water. As long as Peter's focus was on Jesus, he could walk on water, but when things got windy, he started to sink. Jesus immediately reached down and rescued him. What did Jesus ask Peter when he pulled him up? "Why did you doubt?"

Then he told the reporter about Luke 8:22-25 which is the story of Jesus telling his disciples he wants to go across the Sea of Gallilee. Jesus takes a nap, but a storm appears and frightens the disciples. They wake up Jesus telling him they're perishing. Jesus calms the storm and then asks them, "Where is your faith"? Didn't Jesus tell them he wanted to go to the other side? How could they not trust Him? He'd always been there for them.

The reporter, still confused, said, "I don't get it. What does this have to do with finding a bridge?" By the way, what's the name of this bridge? The City of Victory resident smiled and said, "The name of the bridge is 'Faith'".

The City of Victory is open to everyone, but the only way to leave the City of Fear is to fear God and cross the bridge of faith in Jesus.

As you walk out, I've provided a list of verses that speak about:

The Commandments to Fear God

The Blessings of Fearing God

Why We shouldn't be Afraid With God in Our Presence.

I would encourage you to commit as many of these as you can to memory – I'm confident that you will be comforted by the assurances.

In the early days of the church, persecution had already begun to set in. Peter and John had been arrested by the Saducees for preaching Jesus and the resurrection. They would be released and they then joined up with the rest of the early church and prayed for boldness. The result is found in Acts 4:31: "After they prayed, the place

where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” As believers and followers of Jesus Christ, we have the Spirit of God in each of us. There’s a direct link between the presence of the Holy Spirit and Fearing God. Look at what happens when the two become one.

Acts 9:31: Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

There is peace; there is strengthening; and there is encouragement. I don’t see any fear in this verse do you? It’s available to each of us – but we need to choose to walk across the bridge of faith fearing and trusting God He’ll get us to the other side. And when we truly believe in the assurances of God, we go from being **victims** of fear to **victors** in the fear of God.

Barack Obama won the white house with a slogan that helped people believe in his ability to deliver them from their fear – “Change We Can Believe In.” I would like to propose a better slogan – “Jesus We Can Believe In”. He my friends, is where the REAL victory is. Let’s pray.